



Fighting food insecurity in the region

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“In the past when I volunteered with The Food Depot, they would serve a few hundred people a day. They are now serving over 3,000,” says Michael Middlemas, an R&D engineer in the Laboratory’s materials science and technology division.

He has been working volunteer shifts with food distribution nonprofits in Santa Fe since March, when he began teleworking full time.

“It’s been sobering walking around Santa Fe and seeing all the businesses closed. It gives a sense of how many people are out of work right now,” he reflects. “My wife and I are fortunate to have jobs where we are able to work from home and stay employed. Teleworking has opened up the flexibility to volunteer, and it has felt good to be able to get out and help others.”

Two shifts a week

After starting with [The Food Depot](#), more recently he’s been focusing his efforts on two weekly shifts with [Kitchen Angels](#), a nonprofit which prepares and delivers 190 meals a day to house-bound people in need.

“One day I help in the kitchen preparing food for the day’s meal. The other day I help with distribution, packaging meals before they go out for delivery,” says Middlemas.

“Each client gets a custom meal that meets their dietary restrictions, so there is a lot of detail that goes into making sure everything is packaged correctly.”

“It has been a great experience. All of the staff and other volunteers have been wonderful to work with. With all the social distancing, it has been a great opportunity to be around other people and still feel good about it.”

Although he has been mainly volunteering on his own time, Middlemas used the Laboratory’s paid volunteer time for some of his shifts in April. “One week was very busy between work and personal appointments, so that time really helped me to be able to volunteer.”

Social distancing measures in practice

The Kitchen Angels organization places a high priority on safety, especially since many of the people they serve are in a high-risk category for COVID-19.

“Starting when you walk in the door, only one person is allowed in the entry area, and everyone is asked to use hand sanitizer before entering the building,” says Middlemas.

“They provide cloth face masks, hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes in the work areas.

The kitchen has reduced the number of volunteers to allow more social distancing during food preparation.”

Michael makes sure each Kitchen Angels client gets the custom meal that meets their dietary restrictions.

Distribution of the meals has also been rearranged to maximize social distancing. Rather than entering the building, delivery drivers come to the loading dock outside one at a time to pick up their meals for delivery.

Middlemas has some advice for other potential volunteers. “It’s best if you can set aside a specific time each week to volunteer with an organization. That helps them ensure they have the number of volunteers they need for each shift. Treat it like another standing meeting on the calendar. It’s also a good way to get up and moving, which is harder to do now that all our meetings are on Webex.”

“I think it is great that LANL has encouraged employees to get out into the community and volunteer,” he concludes. “With so many parts of life feeling out of control, it’s nice to do something that I know is making a difference in someone’s life right now.”

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